

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY TOKYO

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EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: ETRD, AS

SUBJ: JAPAN EASES BAN ON BEEF IMPORTS

1. THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED ON MARCH 18 THAT THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT HAD PURCHASED 2,400 MT OF AUSTRALIAN BEEF. THE BEEF WILL GO TO THE OKINAWA MARKET, NOT DIRECTLY TO JAPAN. ALTHOUGH IT IS ONLY A TOKEN QUANTITY, BOTH THE FEDERAL AND QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT ARE CLAIMING CREDIT FOR REOPENING THE JAPANESE MARKET WHICH HAS BEEN CLOSED FOR ABOUT A YEAR.

2. THE QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT HAD THREATENED TO STOP COAL EXPORTS UNLESS JAPAN REOPENED ITS MARKET FOR AUSTRALIAN BEEF. FOLLOWING THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF RESUMPTION OF BEEF IMPORTS, THE QUEENSLAND PARLIAMENT IMMEDIATELY MOVED TO RATIFY THE COAL DEAL WITH JAPAN. HOWEVER, ONLY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CAN ACTUALLY GRANT EXPORT LICENSES. THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CLAIMED THE BREAK IN THE JAPANESE BEEF EMBARGO WAS THE RESULT OF AN EXTENDED SERIES OF OFFICIAL (GATT) AND DIPLOMATIC PRESSURES BROUGHT AGAINST JAPAN OVER THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS. THE GOVERNMENT SAID IT WOULD SEE TO IT THAT AUSTRALIA GETS ITS FULL SHARE OF ANY NEW QUOTAS THAT ARE ANNOUNCED IN THE FUTURE.

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3. THE CATTLE MEN WELCOMED THE REOPENING, BUT ARE NOT ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF ANY SIGNIFICANT SALES TO JAPAN FOR SOME TIME. IT WILL LIKELY BE A LONG TIME BEFORE JAPAN IMPORTS ANYWHERE NEAR THE QUANTITY OF AUSTRALIAN BEEF TAKEN IN THE PEAK YEAR, CY 1973 (115,000 MT). INDUSTRY SPOKESMEN HERE ARE URGING THE GOVERNMENT TO MAKE IMMEDIATE PROTESTS TO THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT CONCERNING JAPAN'S PROPOSED NEW MARKET STABILIZATION SCHEME FOR BEEF WHICH WILL AUTOMATICALLY PROHIBIT IMPORTS WHEN PRICES FALL BELOW THE SUPPORT LEVEL. THEY CLAIM THE SUPPORT LEVEL IS TOO HIGH AND THAT IT WILL ENCOURAGE INEFFICIENT DOMESTIC PRODUCTION, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME, DISCOURAGE BOTH CONSUMPTION AND IMPORTS.

COMMENTS: SOURCES HERE INDICATED THAT THERE IS PROBABLY ENOUGH AUSTRALIAN BEEF ALREADY IN COLD STORES IN JAPAN, OR RECENTLY SOLD TO JAPANESE BUYERS TO FILL THIS ORDER. CATTLE AUCTION PRICES HAVE IMPROVED IN THE PAST TWO WEEKS, BUT THIS IS NOT BELIEVED TO BE DUE TO ANY SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT IN THE GENERAL OUTLOOK. THE PRICE STRENGTH APPEARS TO BE DUE TO GOOD SEASONAL CONDITIONS AND THE WITHHOLDING OF ANIMALS FROM MARKET BY PRODUCERS WHO FEEL THE MARKET HAS PROBABLY BOTTOMED AND CAN ONLY GO UP.

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